



OCs & Snowdonia 1911 – 2016 v10

by Alfie Windsor (64-68)



When the ship moved to Glyn Garth in 1941 cadets were drawn by the sight of the mountains of Snowdonia dominating the southern horizon; “*We begged the captain to allow us to walk in the hills at weekends.*” The idea was regarded with suspicion at first but Captain Goddard eventually allowed day expeditions on selected Sundays. The first walk scaled an “*unimposing (and un- identified) hill of 1700 feet. The first tramp in the hills was quite memorable ... we were determined to repeat it.*”

Subsequent trips attacked Y Drosogl, Foel Grach, Foel Fras, Yr Ellen, and



Carnedd Llewyllyn, They were not the first OCs to climb in Snowdonia as Captain H Broadbent RNR (1880-81) had climbed Mt Snowdon on Thursday 7th September 1911 (see left) while on a sailing expedition with a number of members of staff in his yacht *Inyala*.

On 11th and 12th July 1941 cadets Slater and Brooks climbed to the summit of Snowdon in their normal reefers and without any waterproof clothing. Brooks's report of the climb from The Cadet is reproduced below.

“ THANKS, MR. MALCOLM ! ”

I have climbed my first mountain !

On the evening of Friday, July 11th, the Commander sent for Slater and me. He told us that a friend of the Captain, a Mr. Malcolm, who was staying on board, wished to take two cadets for a trip to Snowdon. We had been chosen. Accordingly, at ten o'clock the next morning we set out.

It was a very doubtful sort of day when we landed at ———, the sun competing with a mist and a light drizzle. Once or twice it seemed that the sun had won, but when we got into an already over crowded bus just outside ——— the weather was as doubtful as ever. The added burden of our weight must have been too much for the long suffering bus. It refused to start. The driver and conductor knew how to humour it, however, so that we were carried into ——— at a good pace.

When we got into ——— we took a bus for ———. This started almost at once. It was, unlike the first one, which was a single decker, a double decker, though of somewhat ancient design. It kept up a surprisingly good pace.

It had not carried us very far before the rain, which had been threatening all morning, came down in a heavy shower, which we all hoped would cease before we reached ———, for we were none of us wearing raincoats, while Slater and I, to our subsequent regret, were in our best reefers. Our unspoken prayers were answered, for, by the time the ——— came into view just outside ———, the rain had stopped and the visibility improved.

At 12.20 we came into the square at ———, where three things seemed to my mind to stand out. Two were statues, one of Lloyd George and the other of Sir Hugh Owen. The third was an erection of old stone, built after the fashion of towers and fortresses, which we decided could not be ———

Castle, despite the fact that the Castle Hotel stood within a few yards of it. I am still wondering what it is.

Mr. Malcolm approached a bus inspector, who, after the general manner of bus inspectors, was standing in a raincoat, doing nothing. He was informed that the bus for Llanberis was a double decker that was due in at half past twelve. We arrived at the starting point of the mountain railway soon after one o'clock, and looked around for somewhere to make enquiries, as we had none of us visited Snowdon before. We decided on a shop which was visible some way down the road. Our choice was a good one. The lady who kept the shop gave us clear directions as to the easiest way up the mountain and supplied, at the reasonable price of sixpence, a small handbook guide to Snowdon. To be sure, she first suggested the way via Llanberis Pass., but she gave us warning that it was a stiff climb. Not having too much time to spare, we decided to take the easier way up the saddle track, which, the guide book informed us, is five miles long and rises 3,210 feet. The time given, allowing for observation, was three to four hours. We had a cup of tea in a neighbouring café, after which we set out upon our climb.

Mrs. Goddard had provided for our lunch more sandwiches than we could eat. We lunched off these as we started our ascent. Although the sun had by now gained the upper hand and was quite hot, there were patches of cloud higher up the mountain which gave a serious threat to our chances of seeing very much from the summit. Nevertheless, the heat of the sun gave us hope of the clouds disappearing, and we soon found it so warm that we discarded our reefers, which we hung on our gas mask cases. A little further on our collars and ties followed our reefers. It was here that we began to resent the presence of our reefers, for they were awkward to carry and hampered our movements considerably.

We had now begun our climb in earnest, and the sun seemed to know it, for it grew warmer and warmer as we ascended. We had been told that the last mile and a half was the stiffest part of the climb. We therefore decided to go slowly at first. After the first mile or so the way became a little easier, but the sun was shining with a still increasing vigour. We had nearly completed another mile before we passed anyone. We were then relieved to hear that it was a little cooler higher up. We soon came in sight of the Half Way House. When we passed it, a considerable time later, we felt the first welcome breath of a cooling wind. The summit was still hidden behind a curtain of cloud, but the breeze gave us some slight hope of this being cleared, so we kept on up the track.

By now the unaccustomed effort had begun to tell on me. I found it increasingly difficult to keep up with my companions. Indeed, they too were a little tired, and, when we had gone some little distance past Half Way House, we decided to have a rest before embarking on what looked likely to be a stiffer climb than we had had yet. We sat on a convenient pile of stones and studied the chart which was given in the guide. Then, after this breather, we tackled the slope that lay before us. The other two began to leave me behind. They had frequently to stop for me to keep up with them. I found myself wondering if I should ever reach the summit. More than once I felt like sitting down and leaving them to finish the climb, which they would probably have done more easily without me. But somehow I managed to keep going, and finally came to a level patch where the track runs under the railway. With a feeling of relief I came level with the others, and we took a few

minutes rest to admire what we could see of the view. Already the air around us contained small wisps of cloud. After we started again, when I dropped, almost as if by arrangement, behind the other two, the clouds became steadily denser. After a while I was trailing a bare twenty yards behind the others and could hardly see them.

Just as I was feeling that I could hardly go forward another yard the track became suddenly easier, and I once more came up with Mr. Malcolm and Slater. After keeping along this level track for several minutes, we stopped to examine the chart again, for the visibility was so poor that we could not possibly tell in which direction the summit lay. At first we thought we had reached it. On realising that this could not be so, we put our gas masks and reefers at the side of the track and carried on without them. We climbed for about ten more minutes and finally reached the summit, where, after a short rest, Mr. Malcolm rewarded our efforts with orangeade at the hotel. He also bought us postcards to show what the view is like from the summit, when it is possible to see anything. We were told in the hotel that trains would be running in two days!

We had accomplished the ascent in two hours. We took half an hour less over the descent, stopping only to retrieve our gas masks and reefers, and, considerably lower down, to put on our collars, ties and reefers. When we reached the bottom Mr. Malcolm bought us each a book of photographs and, buying another guide book, gave us one each. We returned to ——— via ———, where we had ice cream. We came back on board tired but happy. We had been away nine hours.

I was on watch on Saturday night....

* * *

It turned out that Brooks had appendicitis. Two days later his appendix was removed.

In 1942 cadets formed the Conway Mountain Climbing Club and parties of six to eight cadets began regular, unsupervised, weekend expeditions into the mountains staying at the youth hostel at Idwal Cottage by Llyn Ogwen. Fraser **MacKenzie** (41-42) led its first expedition on 30th May taking a bus to Llanberis and then walking across to Idwal via Nant Peris, Y Garn, and

"CONWAY" CLIMBING

The first party to stay at Idwal Youth Hostel on Lake Ogwen left by bus for Llanberis on Saturday afternoon, May 30th. It was a fine, sunny day, with a rising glass which promised well in sharp contrast to the pouring rain of the previous Saturday and most of a stormy week.

On arrival at Llanberis we ate an early tea at a small café, and at 4.15 p.m. set out for Idwal, which lies on the north side of the Glyders. We walked along the road to Nant Peris (Old Llanberis) from where we began to ascend the steep, grassy side of Y Garn. The view was the best experienced by any previous expedition, for as we gained height the knife edges of Grib Goch and Lliwedd could be seen perfectly at the opposite side of the Llanberis Pass, with other peaks stretching far to the south and east. Even Snowdon itself was unhidden by the usual veil of mist. For the first time we saw the hills robed with their rich shades of mountain colouring, the olive-green scrub, red patches of loose shale and the deep blue of the mountain tarns, whilst far to the south and west, the sea, bordered by a yellow ribbon of sand, lent further beauty to the scene.

We climbed eastwards round Y Garn to reach Llyn-y-Cwm, the little tarn which pours its waters through that rocky cleft, the Devil's Kitchen, into the valley of the Ogwen, hundreds of feet below. Some of the party were already tired and had dropped behind, so we parted at the tarn, the more ambitious half setting out along the range towards the formidable rocky peak called Tryfan, and the other making straight for Idwal.

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The route to Tryfan was longer than we anticipated, but after the ascent from the tarn over loose skree of all descriptions we found ourselves at the edge of the basin, whose sides form the range of the Glyders. We walked in a semi-circle round the edge until we reached the steep, rocky descent to the cor before Tryfan, the only rock climbing before that being a good scramble over a small peak with vertical pillars like a stickleback.

It was 7.30 p.m. when we began the descent, so we decided to abandon the attempt of Tryfan as it would be too late by the time we reached the hostel, and we did not wish to be a nuisance there. We struck away down steep skrees from a well-known pinnacle on the edge, which we learned later is called the Bristly Ridge, and reached the hostel at 8.0 p.m. Little need be said about the hostel except that we received a welcome stew for supper, and that the number of expert-looking mountaineers made us look very small indeed. During the evening we got into conversation with a climber who knew the hills very well, and he was rather surprised when we explained where we had descended, because the Bristly Ridge is quite a formidable scramble for a beginner, the North Edge of Tryfan being no worse.

The following morning we once more separated into two parties, seven to climb Tryfan by the North Edge and the remainder going to Llyn-y-Cwm by a shorter route, where they were to meet us above the Devil's Kitchen about lunch time. We set out bare of rope or mountaineering equipment, in between small parties with it all, who, on hearing us state Tryfan as our object, stared at us in surprise.

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The first part of the ascent is merely a very steep path, and our rate of ascent made several people we passed glance at us as though to say "They won't keep that up for long." Strangely enough, we did, and reached the summit in an hour and a quarter. The last half-hour was the most interesting part as there was a considerable amount of enjoyable climbing up small rock faces and narrow chimneys. At the top is a double natural cairn in the form of two stone pillars about ten feet in height and three feet apart, called Adam and Eve. Naturally, we completed the climb by scaling them. They are easy from the west side. It did not take us long to drop down to the col between Tryfan and Bristly Ridge. We left the top of Tryfan at 11.40 a.m. and reached the top of Bristly Ridge about an hour later. It was the first real rock climbing that most of us had done, and it was certainly quite exciting, although none of us had any difficulty. The most exciting part of all was rounding the pinnacle to the right. Two of the party had climbed to the top of it from the south side the night before, but this time we only went about half way up by a narrow chimney on the north side, and then round to the right on a narrow ledge over a fairly high, sheer drop.

Once we rounded the top of the ridge we returned along the edge of the basin by the same path we used the night before, all the good climbing already passed. We ate our lunch near the top of the Glyder after seeing the other party far below us at the rendezvous. There was a chilly breeze and the view was not so clear as on the previous evening, but the clouds had lifted from the mountains again, and, though the colours were not so pronounced as before, as the

afternoon wore on the sunlight again prevailed and the scenery was very beautiful.

The other party got cold waiting for us and when we reached the Devil's Kitchen they were nearly at the top of Y Garn. It is a magnificent high level walk all the way to Bethesda slate quarries, and, after the hard climbing in the morning, was very restful, and the comfort of a level road is an unbelievable relief after descending very steep grassy slopes, as all those who have climbed mountains will know. Except for one member, who lost a shoe in the River Ogwen, no accidents occurred.

In the 'bus back to the ship we met our climber friend again. He had seen us set off up the north face of Tryfan and two hours later had expected to meet us at the top, but to his surprise we were far away. Our progress apparently impressed him considerably and he has promised to induce us to the arts of rope climbing if he receives leave in the near future.

It is interesting to trace the climbs in order since before Christmas, 1941. The first was an unimposing hill of about 1,700 feet, and after Christmas followed other expeditions to Y Drogsl, Foel Grach, Foel Fras, Yr Ellen, and Carnedd Llewelyn; this term the expeditions have become week-end parties instead of Sunday only, and Snowdon has twice been climbed by different routes, also the steep side of Carnedd Dafydd; now Tryfan, the mountain with the reputation of having the greatest variety of climbing in Britain, is numbered among them. Better and longer expeditions than these are anticipated and looked forward to with great eagerness by us all.

T. R. L. FRASER MACKENZIE.



Idwal Cottage Today, A Youth Hostel

A similar routine would be followed year round by generations of cadets for the next 27 years; *"These expeditions were excellent ... and left one greatly refreshed."* Days at Idwal were often rounded off with a swim in the freezing cold lake. In August 1944 R. Martin (42-44) was part of a party which climbed Glyder Fawr *"in freezing snow and*

a howling gale; our hands and hair were frozen by the wind". By 1949 things had begun to slip somewhat as on 2nd December the Headmaster, T E W Browne (TEWB) met Mr Mercer from Idwal Cottage and was told that cadets "were not popular at Idwal as they took up hostel room but rarely did any climbing choosing rather to drift back to Bethesda and sit in the milk bar." He decided to tighten up arrangements for the future.

In December 1945 the Reverend J. H. Williams, Rector of Llanberis formed the 1st Snowdon Scout Group, open to boys from local schools. TEWB saw this as a solution to the issues around Idwal Cottage, especially as a scout

group would be more controlled than the cadets' self organised *Conway* Mountain Climbing Club. He consulted Captain Goddard, Padre Turner and Rev., Williams and they agreed that *Conway* cadets would join the group to learn rock climbing, to train expedition leaders and encourage cadets to qualify for the Snowdon Badge, the Climber Badge and ultimately become Ranger Scouts. Four patrols were created for

Conway cadets; Cairngorm (Mizzentop), Kinder Scout (Maintop), Peak (Foretop), Precelly (Foc's'le) and Shap (Hold) and they competed each year for the Snowdon Trophy.

Williams provided accommodation in his Rectory at Llanberis. At first take up was slow - *"A group of about eight cadets would go to Port Dinorwic (PD) on Friday evening and take the bus to Llanberis. We would stay in the vicarage Friday and Saturday nights. During the day we*



*Above: Rev Williams & Cadets
Below: 1946 On Cwm Wigau*



would climb a mountain in the area if the weather permitted, if not we would go on a low altitude hike.



Llanberis Rectory Today

Any spare time we had we would work on the standard scout activities. Mountain first aid seemed to be the thing we concentrated on most (many OCs will remember the Rev's first aid lessons). Although we did not wear scout uniform we did work for the scout badges. We found it a nice way to get away for the weekend with very little discipline. It seemed to be very popular with the smokers. One winter with a group of cadets we climbed up the side of the Devils Chimney in the mountains got lost in a snowstorm and came down on the wrong side of the mountain and had to walk 14 miles back to Capel Curig."

In 1945 J. **Haigh** (41-43) presented a shield called The Haigh Trophy to be awarded for the best mountain expedition of the year competed for by teams from each Division ('Ship' as they were at the time). The first award was to *Nestor* under the leadership of D. **Howard** (43-45) for a circular walk from Idwal to Bethesda via Tryfan, Llyn Ogwen, Carnedd Dafydd, Carnedd Llewelyn, Fole Fras and Yr Drogsgyl. Later it changed to a day-

long map-reading exercise decoding directional clues and climbing several mountains with a few tests of initiative - ‘incidents’ - thrown in along the way. All against the clock. *“The day would start very, very early. Teams were taken by coach and dropped off at various start points on the circular route in the mountains where they were handed the first clue to set them on their way. It would be well after 7 pm before we got back to Camp.”*

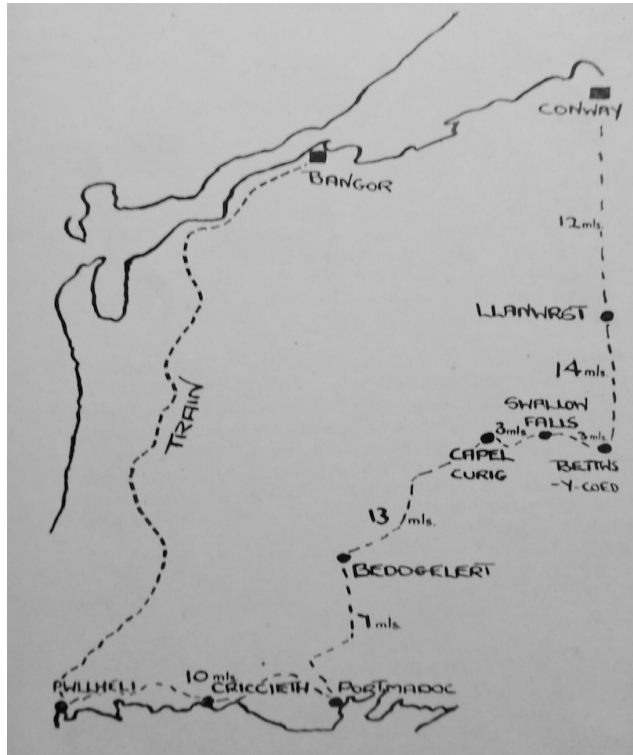
“One test was to sound the middle a lake using a Kelvin deep-sea sounding apparatus – a glass tube in a metal container attached to the lead. The problem was two-fold: to rig a means of getting the lead out to the middle of the lake, and to get the discolouration of the glass tube necessary to gauge the depth of water against the boxwood scale. The first was done by stretching a line across the lake with a pulley-block made fast to its mid-part carrying the sounding-line, and the second by the simple expedient of arming the open end of the tube with a pinch of salt.” As this was a salt water device measuring a fresh water lake, success depended on adding the salt yet no salt was provided. However on arrival each party was provided with bags of crisps; the old fashioned sort with small bags of salt in them. Many cadets happily sprinkled the salt on their crisps before realising the error of their ways.

Another involved *“diving into ice cold water to place a panel over a hole and then pump out the water. It was supposed to be a submarine that had sunk and the idea was to see if we could work out how to raise the sub. We also had to build a bridge across a small river / stream or build a raft from 45 gal oil drums and float your team across.”* At each of the challenges there would be a very cold officer or teacher waiting to make sure all teams played the game, to allocate points and hand out the clue to the next challenge.

In 1955, when the circuit was around Snowdon, two teams were taken to the summit in a special open train as shown right.



Considerable distances were covered. *"I feel tired out thinking of those mountain days - but great fun even at the time."* In July 1945 a weekend party led by S. **Seccombe** (44-45) walked 62 miles from Pwelli to Conway. On Friday evening they covered six miles and camped near Llanystundwy. On Saturday they covered just over 30 miles via Beddgellert and Capel Curig to spend the night in a barn near 'The Ugly House,' at Swallow Falls. On the Sunday they walked 29 miles to Conway (town) via Bettws-Y-Coed and Llanrwst. They had planned to walk the final miles to Bangor but time was against them so they were forced to catch a bus; *"We arrived back on board at 7.30pm very tired but in excellent spirits"*. Their route is shown right.



Above: 1945 The Seccombe Party's Route

On 23rd March 1946 a party of six Snowdon Group cadets, led by Williams climbed the steep cliffs of Clogwyn Mawr on the lower slopes of Snowdon. The Climbing Club of Great Britain promptly renamed it The *Conway* Crag in their Club Guide but it has since reverted to its original name. Climbing *Conway* Crag became a regular feature of Snowdon Group activity. Note, Snowdonia has at least four peaks called Clogwyn Mawr, one a free standing mountain above Capel Curig, one above Dolwyddelan and, confusingly, two small summits both on the Llanberis Valley side of Snowdon. "Our" Clogwyn Mawr is the one overlooking Llanberis lake, nearest to the town.

By the end of 1949 well over a thousand cadet visits to Llanberis had been completed and the group had over 40 cadets. A birthday party was held every February and a grand camp-fire meeting every summer.

In 1952 **Malcolm Watts** recalls *"I cannot recall having a "leader" at Idwal, it was just a jolly away from the ship for the week-end. I think there was always a CC with us. I do remember one weekend our group, 5 of us I think, climbed up to the top behind Idwal when the clouds came down and we could not see but a few yards around us. Eventually we found an easy route down, still in heavy clouds, and made our way down to find we had come down on the Llanberis side. Somehow transport was arranged back to Idwal to collect our gear and return to the ship. Although we did not get into trouble over it, it was the last time I was allowed to go. The fine*



Above: 1953 Cadets on Crib Goch

At the end of 1953 membership reached a record high of over 60 so group leader J. Edge (52-53) started monthly patrol meetings in the Seamanship Room at the Dock. This gave much more time for badge work.

In May 1954 the Padre decided they needed a flagpole at Llanberis rectory for scouting ceremonies so cadets selected, felled and prepared a tree from



Above: 1954 The Flagpole En-route To Llanberis

Marquis's estate. Two parties of cadets were transported by boat to PD where they collected the flagpole which had been towed down earlier. Two parties of cadets were transported by boat to PD where they collected the flagpole which had been towed down earlier. They then shared carrying duties for the 12 mile walk from PD to Llanberis rectory carrying the flagpole on their shoulders. F. **Brown** (53-55) remembers the weather was fine although the cadets wore oilskins for the whole journey. The press covered the event and turned it into an obstacle course by insisting on repeat performances so that scenic photos could be captured in the best light.

"During our last afternoon at Llanberis I was advised that the Conway ensign was up the mast without a down haul. This posed a huge problem and without a fly rod and line almost insurmountable. However a bent pin on a string tied to a stone eventually solved the problem!"

On 7th July 1954 the Chief Commissioner For Scouting In Wales, The Rt Hon The Lord Kenyon of Credington DC JP was the guest of honour at the annual Prize Day. In his speech he spoke highly of *Conway* and her involvement with scouting, wishing there were *"more institutions of the*

caliber of the Conway in North Wales to lend colour and inspiration to scouting”.

In the Summer of 1955 Williams moved to become Vicar of Caernarfon so the Snowdon Group had to vacate Llanberis Rectory for a new bunkhouse in the Royal Victoria Hotel’s annex. The new accommodation was much more spacious although very spartan with just a single cold water tap. The annex was a long three story building and boys used the first floor above the coach house/ stables/ garages which had a passageway running down the back wall. The first room was the galley followed by the bedrooms. Somewhere there must have been the heads.



*Above: The Group’s annex to the side of the Royal Victoria Hotel
Below: Mike Pickthorne’s (53-55) Snowdon Group Pennant*



P. Shepherd (56-57) recalls *“Llanberis was not the most comfortable place to spend a week end and I don't remember the weather being anything but grey and damp, and along with our "rations" and the accommodation, it was hardly the Cannes Majestic. There was a lot of good fun in it, and you might say we enjoyed a relaxation of the Ship's very rigorous daily discipline to enjoy burnt sausages and Saltash Rig for a couple of days.”*

In 1956 R. **Jackson** (54-56) became *Conway's* first Queen Scout.

Some groups returning from the mountains would save themselves miles of walking by taking a short cut through the old tubular Britannia Bridge. This was not without its risks as the line was still fairly busy. *"A group of us had been climbing Snowdon for the weekend and on our return to the Rectory in Llanberis learned we were snowed in with little prospect of return to Port Dinorwic in time to catch the launch back to the Conway on Sunday evening. We agreed to walk back via Caernarfon and Menai Bridge, a distance of 21 miles. We set off on Sunday evening and all went well until about 2 am when tiredness and the bitter weather were beginning to tell on some of the group. By this time, faced with the conditions, tiredness and the distance ahead, we decided that a short cut through the tubular railway bridge might ease all these difficulties."* The bridge consisted of four large metal rectangular box-section spans, like tunnels suspended on piers. The two main spans were each 460 feet long with two shorter spans linking to the shore. They were completely unlit and just wide and tall enough to accommodate trains. *"Having cut across the Vaynol estate to the bridge we split into three groups, the lead off group as they approached the halfway point in the tunnel would flash their torches to indicate that all was well. The sight of the torch flashes set off the second group who would follow the same procedure. I was with the third group who once again set off on seeing the flashes from the second group. For the first few yards, at both ends of the tunnels, the two tunnels interconnected, thereafter they singled up into their own tubes. It was pitch black inside with no light whatsoever and all there was to guide us through were timber planks running alongside the rail track. It was an eerie and claustrophobic atmosphere, the rhythmic sounds of feet upon timber planks and the sensation of someone in front or behind, as we moved at the double. After what seemed an age there was a sudden change in our rhythm and a pressure on the ears; there was a train in the tunnel behind us! A cold feeling of fear gripped us. I stumbled and fell across the railway track striking my head upon something hard. Momentarily I lost all consciousness and with it all sense of foreboding. In those few seconds I lay there, then I saw this bright light bearing down on me and a loud rumbling sound. I threw myself sideways and lay perfectly still, the wheels of the 3 am Holyhead express, passing within inches of my head. Seconds passed, I raised my head and saw the red lights of the last carriage in the steam and smoke that outlined a silhouette of the tunnel exit within yards of where I lay. I went to raise myself, placing my hand on a warm and*

moist object. Cadet X had been in front of me and for one horrendous moment I thought it was him without his head! I moved to lift him and found to my relief that it was a kit bag with warm engine oil at the neck of the bag. I remember running from the tunnel and jumping over a wire fence and rolling down the embankment where I rejoined the others. We arrived back at Plas Newydd exhausted just after 4 am on Monday morning."

After the 1957 Haigh Trophy competition while the competitors were assembling at the annex for late afternoon tea and cakes Llanberis police arrived and asked the group to help rescue two injured climbers on Conway Crag. Group members **Burgess, Dunn, Friend, McDermott, Quinn-Young, Shepherd** and **Taylor** were selected; *"We were all in the peak of fitness ... within seconds we had our hiking gear on and were heading up Snowdon"* They were despatched by special train to Halfway Station and then *"my recollection of the occasion was the was really rough terrain in the area over which we had to run"* to reach the injured climbers carrying stretchers and medical equipment. *"When we arrived at the accident site, some rescuers were already on scene and administering rudimentary first aid, especially to the unconscious man, who we helped lay on the stretcher."* *"One of the injured climbers had what was thought to be a fractured skull as he was bleeding from his ear/s."* *"I remember being told by one of the other rescuers that when he'd arrived on the scene, he was concerned about the more seriously injured unconscious climber who had difficulty breathing. He thought he was about to swallow his tongue and so he'd pinned his tongue to his lower lip with a large safety pin – a normal procedure in such accidents, he said ... With the wind picking up and a squall blowing across the mountain, a cover – blanket or tarp – was placed across the stretcher to give the injured man protection from the elements as we carried him"* After one and a half hours of climbing, lowering and carrying across rocky terrain, the injured men were placed safely onto the waiting train just as torrential rain started. Everyone was transported to Llanberis and *"I believe the injured were taken to Bangor Hospital"* but it is understood that the seriously injured man sadly did not survive his (head) injuries. This incident though proved the value of the Snowdon Group, as it was observed of our rescuers *"They*

were trained , they knew what they were doing, and they didn't hesitate to join in and get the job done, to help someone in distress without realising the mark of their contribution". Within days of the incident most of the rescuers had left Conway for the sea so they never received any real acknowledgment of their actions – until now!



*Above: 1960, Snowdon Group On Conway Crag
Below: 1961 - Dutton, Burge & Lloyd-Jones Climbing On Conway Crag*

By the late 50's / early 60's Conway's membership of the group regularly exceeded 70 and over 500 cadets had been members since 1946.

In 1960 the Snowdon Group moved from the hotel to the spacious old grammar school at the Northern end of Brynrefail village at the lower end of Llanberis lake. However that building was later sold (and demolished in 2000) so in September 1962 they moved temporarily to Caernarfon rectory.



Unfortunately the rectory was very small and could only accommodate a few cadets so opportunities for mountaineering weekends were severely curtailed. It was also a three hour walk from the mountains, limiting how much could be achieved in a weekend. Membership of the group began to dwindle. In September 1963 they moved to Hafod Bach (Little Summer House), an old two storey

farmhouse with adjacent barn on Ceunant Street close to the mountain railway's Waterfall Station. It remained in use until at least Summer 65



*Above: 1963 outside the front door of Hafod Bach Neil
second left*

*Left: 1963 – Outside Hafod Bach with the Group
Badge*

Below: The House (right) and barn (left)

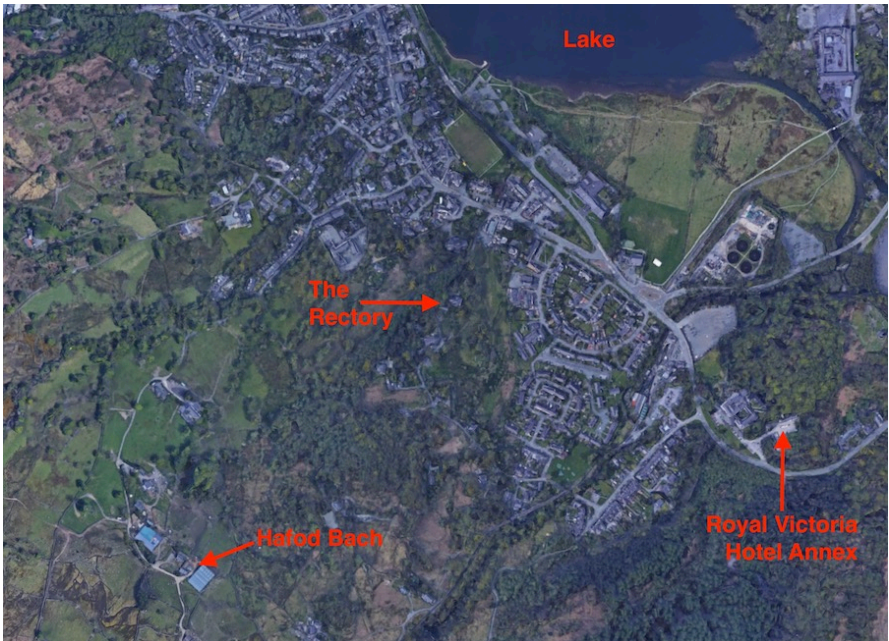




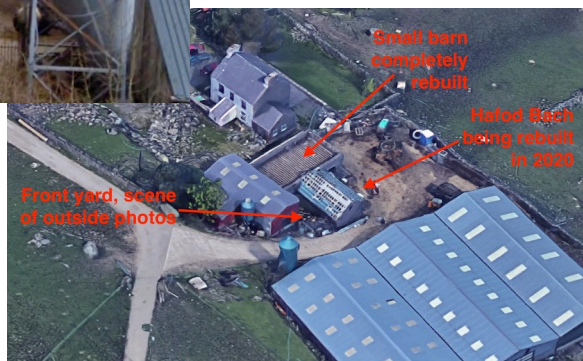
Above & Below: Snowdon Group relaxing at Hafod Bach



The location of Hafod Bach and two other overnight spots is below.



Hafod Bach fell into complete disrepair but was being completely rebuilt in 2020 as a private holiday home.



“I participated in 1960 (Haigh Trophy) for Hold Division. It was a scorching hot day and we had no water with us so the few mountain streams had to suffice for quenching our thirst when we found them and then luckily we found a milk bottle, which we took, filled as opportunity arose, along some stages with us. I am sad to say that despite our sterling efforts Hold ended up with the lowest score of 50.6 points. The first task, set by Geoff Drake, was to remove a heavy boulder from the body of ‘Charlie’ without further damage to his anatomy. I expect we killed the poor dummy. At another base our attempts were not too impressive; ‘Hold arrived but planning beforehand was not a noticeable feature. Turner climbed up one tree quite well but had no clear idea of what he was to do when there.’ As Turner and I were used to climbing the tree between Port and Starboard Hold for a smoke, we could have put it to good use that day if no officers had been around!”

In the very cold winter of 63-64 the Easter term weather was so cold away rugby matches were cancelled so *“we all went to climb Snowdon - up the back way and down the railway side. We climbed Snowdon in sea boots and duffle coats. Brooke Smith and Kingsford said at the summit that if any cadets beat them down they would buy a beer for them. I think 6 or 10 cadets beat them down.”* In the same cold winter Adrian **Mitchell** (62-65) was in a party that *“went up the crag in T shirt and shorts whilst it was snowing and then walked down and across the frozen lake on the south side. Great fun. Just didn't feel the cold in those days”.*

The established routine of weekend expeditions organised by boys separately to the Snowdon Group outings continued into the early/mid 60's. Groups of six to ten cadets would prepare an itinerary and set off from the ship on Friday afternoon, get themselves to the mountains where they would walk and scramble around their chosen itinerary. Sometimes the galley (Bedford) van was used to transport cadets and their kit to the mountains. They would camp out for two nights and return to the ship on Sunday evening. Expeditions were written up and handed over to the Duty Officer for checking and filing. There were a few gash tents but cadets often just took their bed-spring covers as make-shift hammocks, lashed them up in the trees and slept under the stars. (Ed – these liners were made from a heavy canvas material with numerous brass eyelets at each end – perhaps they were the original hammocks from the ship....) *“I remember one weekend in 1967 a group of 4 of us camped on the hill way up above the Aber Falls. The slope was so steep our hammocks were at ground level at one end and about five feet up in the air at our feet! We were swinging*

away in our hammocks, yarning away in the silence of the Welsh mountains, fire burning quietly when the local forestry warden appeared demanding to know who we were and what the hell we thought we were doing with a fire on 'his' hillside. He was all set to turf us off but once he realised we were Conway cadets - we were allowed to stay" There was no adult supervision, cadets were completely on their own. Probably impossible in today's health and safety mad world, yet in almost 20 years no one ever was injured or needed rescuing.

Some cadets evolved the concept beyond that intended. *"Two of us more senior cadets used one such trip as a cover for a camping weekend with our dancing class partners in a quiet corner of a public park by the strait in Bangor. The rest of our party (younger cadets chosen with great care) were despatched into the mountains as planned. The two of us changed out of our mountaineering kit into smart civvies on the way into town. To the surprise of the rest of the group, when we reached Bangor we left them to their trek whilst we made for the park. We had a relaxing time with our young ladies, lazing in the sun, wandering along the foreshore, gazing across the strait and constructing our walking notes (based on an emotive vision of conditions in the mountains - and quick cross checks with the rest of our bemused group back in the ship on Sunday evening). On Saturday afternoon, knowing no fear, I sauntered into Bangor with my young lady on my arm without a care in the world. Unfortunately Mrs Lord had decided to go shopping that day. Wandering up the High Street we came face to face. I looked at her and nearly died, she looked at me - for a very, very long time (perhaps it was just the bright lobster colour I had turned), then at my partner, then back at me. I thought 'that's it, my promising career as an senior cadet captain is about to crumble....' Obviously being a very busy lady (and perhaps a bit short sighted?) she said nothing and walked on. Like a condemned man I made the best of the rest of the weekend and scuttled back to the ship on Sunday evening expecting the worst. Nothing happened. I awaited the deadly call from Lordy, Eric or Brookie all day on Monday. Nothing happened. After several more days of sweating nothing happened. What a nice lady."*

The format of the Haigh Trophy changed in 1967 to allow more cadets to benefit from its challenging format each division could now enter two teams with the B team following a slightly less physically demanding course. The course that year was typical. Starting at Bont Newydd below Aber Falls it was a semi circular route scaling Llwytmor 2,700 feet, Foel Fras 3,092 feet and Drum 2,592 feet, a steep descent to Hafod y Gwyn

(near Roewen), a climb over the Tan y Fan ridge to Cefn Coch stone circle and finally back to Llanfairfechan. Approximately 14 miles of mountain walking and a total ascent of 4,240 feet. Directional clues involved things like Spanish translation and mathematical calculations without which the next destination could not be determined. Waypoint tests included two mathematics challenges, navigation, science and first aid. Points were awarded for time taken over the route, accuracy of map references, problems solved and expedition logs. Mizzentop won.

By 1964 Snowdon Group numbers were falling because:

1. The Snowdon Group's long standing *Conway* organiser, Headmaster 'TEWB' Browne retired. He was Assistant Commissioner for North Wales Scouts Training, leader of the UK contingent to the 1955 Jamboree at Niagara on the Lake, Canada. He was also a Sea Scout Commissioner for a time.
2. Many non-*Conway* members of the Snowdon Group also wanted to use Hafod Bach severely limiting its availability although cadets were still using it in the summer of 1965.
3. Cadets began joining the newly introduced Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DoEAS) which also ran mountaineering weekends. Groups if cadets were out almost every weekend,
4. Captain Hewitt decided to allow any party of cadets to organise their own mountaineering trips.

In the summer of 1964 the last Snowdon Group report appeared in The Cadet and the DoEAS seemed to take its place from then on. Although the Snowdon Group definitely continued though the Summer of 65 and work was undertaken for the Snowdon Trophy competition it was not awarded in 1965 because a



*TEWB Browne
14th Oct 1960*

patrol "got into a wee bit of bother and it caused a bit of a row with Eric. Basil Lord advised that Foretop would have won it if it had been awarded.

The last reference in The Cadet to scouting was for 24th June 1966 when *Conway* was registered as a 'Sponsored Scout Group in the Lone Groups Section'. **Roughton** (64-67) and **Suffian** (64-67) both qualified as Queen Scouts. According to Gwynedd Council Archives the overall Snowdon Group seems to have closed in 1969.

Under the new regime of DoEAS and self organised parties, cadets participated in regular 15 and 30 mile expeditions to familiar peaks like Tryfan, the Glyders, Carneddau and Moel Siabod but now always staying under canvas. The last recorded DoEAS report was in the September 1965 The Cadet and is reproduced below.

DUKE OF EDINBURGH AWARD SCHEME

There was considerable activity on and around the mountains this term. Hardly a week-end went by when there was not at least one party out either for the day or on an overnight expedition. A number of novices have been introduced to the mysteries of mountain worship. Most of our devotions have been located in the Carneddau, easy of access being relatively near at hand, far from the maddening crowd even in high summer, and not too severe for the most part. Even the Carneddau, though, are not to be taken for granted as Tighe and company discovered when, early in the term they camped beside a mountain stream that rose suddenly in the night, removing their rucksacks miraculously, without disturbing the sleeping campers. We learnt a salutary lesson that night; that it is unwise to make camp a mere three feet above a mountain stream as it approaches lower ground, especially if the camp site is near a narrow defile, since rain may fall heavily on the higher ground, causing a small tidal wave to come driving down the mountain. Such a wave may carry great power, the more so if the bed of the stream is not broad.

That week-end persuaded several of our number, wisely, that a bed in "Conway" is more comfortable, cheaper and in every way more estimable than a sodden blanket on some exposed mountainside, particularly

when one knows that the grey and uninviting dawn by no means promises a breakfast even as appetising as that produced by the galley. Whilst Tighe's party was facing its Waterloo, or, at any rate its Dunkirk, another and larger party, encamped beside the Llyn at the head of the Aber Valley was gravely threatened by rising waters there. Intelligence reports suggested large stocks of fish in this Llyn. All that was needed to land a great draught was a vessel, so we struck up on the idea of building a raft there. We thought, simple beings, that our gear could be transported for us to the lake, which is several miles from the nearest road, by the mountain-climbing Haaflinger vehicle belonging to the University Department of Agriculture. This is a remarkable conveyance, but though it can negotiate unbelievable gradients and isolated rocks, it cannot traverse bog. It was bog that forced us to portage our raft-building equipment and our tents for the last gruelling mile. Once there we constructed our raft and made several lengthy voyages with rod and hook; no fish. But there was water, above and below and soon not only the raft but also the camp was afloat. Hence if these expeditions and others like them serve no other useful purpose, they do make the "Conway" cadets more appreciative of the blessings of the Block.

More Photos: Choose 'Moutaineering' on
<http://www.hmsconway.org/photo%20themes.html>

The Snowdon Trophy

The trophy was carved into a wooden panel, perhaps from the ship. It shows Snowdon from Llyn Glaslyn off the Pyg Track, with two camp fires. It was awarded every term from Easter 1947 to Summer 1964 to the top Patrol. The plaques shown on the next two pages list the names of wining Patrols and their leaders.



THE SNOWDON TROPHY

1947

Easter Peak.

J.P. GOULD

Summer Peak

D. CAPSTICK

Christmas. Cairngorm

G.T. MONKS

1948

Easter. Kinder Scout.

C.W. TROWBRIDGE

Summer. Shap.

IAN HAY

Christmas. Shap.

G. POW.

1949

Easter. Precelly.

A.H.M. THURGOOD

Summer. Cairngorm.

A.G. DUNLOP

Christmas. Peak.

J.M. BOSWORTH

1950

Easter. Kinder Scout.

R.H. WILLS

Summer. Kinder Scout.

H.T.A. BRADFORD

Christmas. Shap.

R.R. CUTHBERT

SUMMER 1961.

Cairngorm

R. TONGE.

SUMMER 1962.

Cairngorm

P.M. PENNELL.

SUMMER 1963

Peak

J.A.M. CLYMONT.

CHRISTMAS 1961.

Peak

T.M. HAMBLETON.

CHRISTMAS 1962.

Shap

V.B. WEBSTER.

CHRISTMAS 1963

Precelly

C.D. SHANNON.

EASTER 1962.

Precelly

D.G. JONES.

EASTER 1963.

Peak

J.A.M. CLYMONT.

EASTER 1964

Peak

M.J. DUNHAM.

SUMMER 1964

Precelly

D.J. HARROLD.

THE CONWAY CRAG

Cligwyn Mawr, Snowdon

1st Ascent 23rd March 1946

70th Anniversary Ascent 23rd March 2016

1951-
Easter. Peak
J.T.B. BOARD

SUMMER 1951
Ship Patrol
W.J. TURNER

CHRISTMAS 1951
Shap Patrol
J.R. MASSEY.

EASTER 1952
Cairngorm Patrol
P. H. WOOD.

SUMMER 1952.
Shap Patrol.
J. BOLTON.

CHRISTMAS 1952.
Precelly.
P. J. SCOTT.

EASTER 1953.
Peak.
P. W. PHILIP.

SUMMER 1953.
Peak.
P. W. PHILIP.

CHRISTMAS 1953.
Peak.
R. BARLOW.

EASTER 1954.
Cairngorm.
D. BATTEN.

SUMMER 1954.
Shap.
J. F. E. BLACKIE.

CHRISTMAS 1954.
Cairngorm.
J. N. BARHAM.

EASTER 1955.
Cairngorm.
I. G. WATSON.

SUMMER 1955.
Kinder Scout.
F. E. BROWN.

CHRISTMAS 1955
Cairngorm
A. K. DEACON.

EASTER 1956
Peak
R. WICKING

SUMMER 1956.
Kinder Scout
R. L. JACKSON.

CHRISTMAS 1956.
Kinder Scout
P. J. CHESTER.

EASTER 1957.
Peak
E. P. BURN.

SUMMER 1957.
Precelly.
D. DEER.

CHRISTMAS 1957.
Precelly.
R. G. RADFORD.

EASTER 1958
Cairngorm
R. F. ROBERTS.

SUMMER 1958
Precelly
P. BOWERS.

CHRISTMAS 1958
Cairngorm
M. E. F. CLIFFORD.

SUMMER 1959
Kinder Scout
J. H. ACKRILL.

CHRISTMAS 1959
Precelly
J. H. ACKRILL.

EASTER 1960
Cairngorm
D. J. C. FUNNELL.

SUMMER 1960
Cairngorm
D. J. C. FUNNELL.

EASTER 1961
Peak
N. J. JACKSON.

23rd March 2016 70th Anniversary Climb Of The Conway Crag

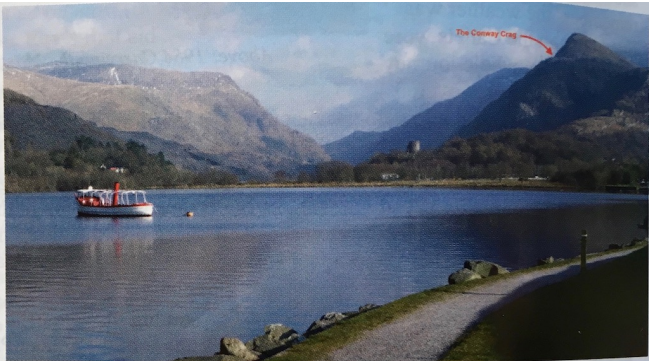


by Mike Reeves (56-59)

Quit Ye Like Men Be Strong, the Conway motto, could certainly be apt for our Conway Crag climb on 23rd March 2016 to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the climb by Conway Cadets on exactly the same March day

in 1946. To be correct, we should use the Welsh name of Clogwyn Mawr (1530 feet), Conway Crag being given by the British Mountaineering Society at the time but now dropped from the OS maps.

In the summer of 2015, Alfie Windsor (64-68) began planning the walk to celebrate the climb by the Snowdon Group Cadets, led by Rev JH Williams, Vicar of Llanberis. The 1946 Cadets climbed the difficult NE face; in 2016, we planned to walk up the Llanberis path from the gentler SW side, an easier ascent considering the average age profile. It quickly became clear that numbers would be good; on the day, there were 46 walkers (34 OCs) plus 14 spectators, many of whom planned to take the Snowdon Railway to the Halfway Station and wave at us along the way.



Approximately 35 of us gathered on Tuesday evening for an impromptu dinner with much revelry. Four current Conway Merchant Navy Trust Trainees/Cadets were present, plus two former Trainees. (See Page 30).

Wednesday morning dawned dry with a light NE wind. After a safety briefing, we set off at 1000hrs, led by John Evans (66-69) who lives at Penisa'r Waun near Llanberis and is well acquainted with the area. Unfortunately, no one took up Alfie's offer of free evening beers if they climbed in a sou'wester and oilskins. John guided us through Coed Victoria woods to our base camp at the Penceunant Isaf café. Here we stopped to let the stragglers catch up before gathering under the Conway Ensign, held high on a pole above Alfie's rucksack.





With the Ensign in the lead, the serious march began up the rocky Llanberis path to a ridge above the Snowdon Mountain Railway track near Halfway Station. With impeccable timing, we only had to wait a few minutes before the train appeared around the ridge, hooting away. Led by our Vice President Conrad Blakey (56-59), our spectators indulged in much waving and calling from the warmth of the carriage.

Off we all trekked once more, with the Ensign flying proudly in the breeze, over moorland and rocky outcrops to the famed crag of Clogwyn Mawr which overlooks Llyn Peris reservoir. We found a suitable rock face on which to fix the Conway memorial plaque, on the NE side of the slabs overlooking the old slate quarries of Nant Peris at grid reference 594584. The plaque was fixed in position and then unveiled, the ceremony performed by our Senior Hand John Bolton (51-52) and Junior Hand John Spofforth (2013-18) (*bottom right*).

Finding sheltered spots from the biting NE breeze, (+2C in the shelter of the rocks), the party tucked into their packed lunches and tipples from flasks.



Walking at a brisk downhill pace, (hard on the knees), an hour brought us back to the Penceunant Isaf Caf  for local Conwy Brewery beer and Bara Brith (Welsh tea cake). During the afternoon, the party straggled back to the Royal Victoria for a well-earned rest to help their aching legs.

A most jovial evening followed, with tales of yesteryear and present news flowing between OCs, many of whom don't normally attend Conway functions. Of course, no Conway event would be complete without a lively rendition of our Conway song and Hullabaloo, much to the amazement of the Trainees and hotel staff.

Thanks must go to Alfie Windsor and his long-suffering wife Jan for the inspiration and excellent organisation. Without doubt, this was one of the most enjoyable Conway events ever, partly thanks to the fickle Snowdon weather being kind. Not so the next day when driving back through Wales in pouring rain and wind.

